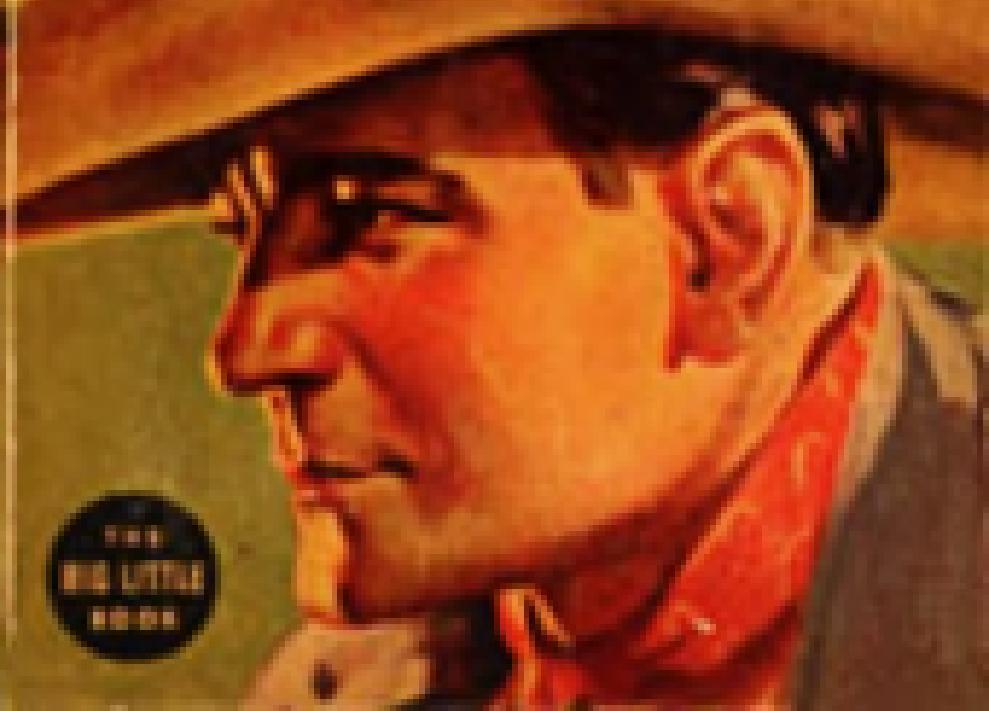


BUCK JONES

AND THE
TWO-GUN KID



BUCK JONES AND THE TWO-GUN KID

By Gaylord DuBois

Illustrated by Robert R. Weisman



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Buck Glanced Up and Down the Street

BUCK JONES AND THE TWO-GUN KID

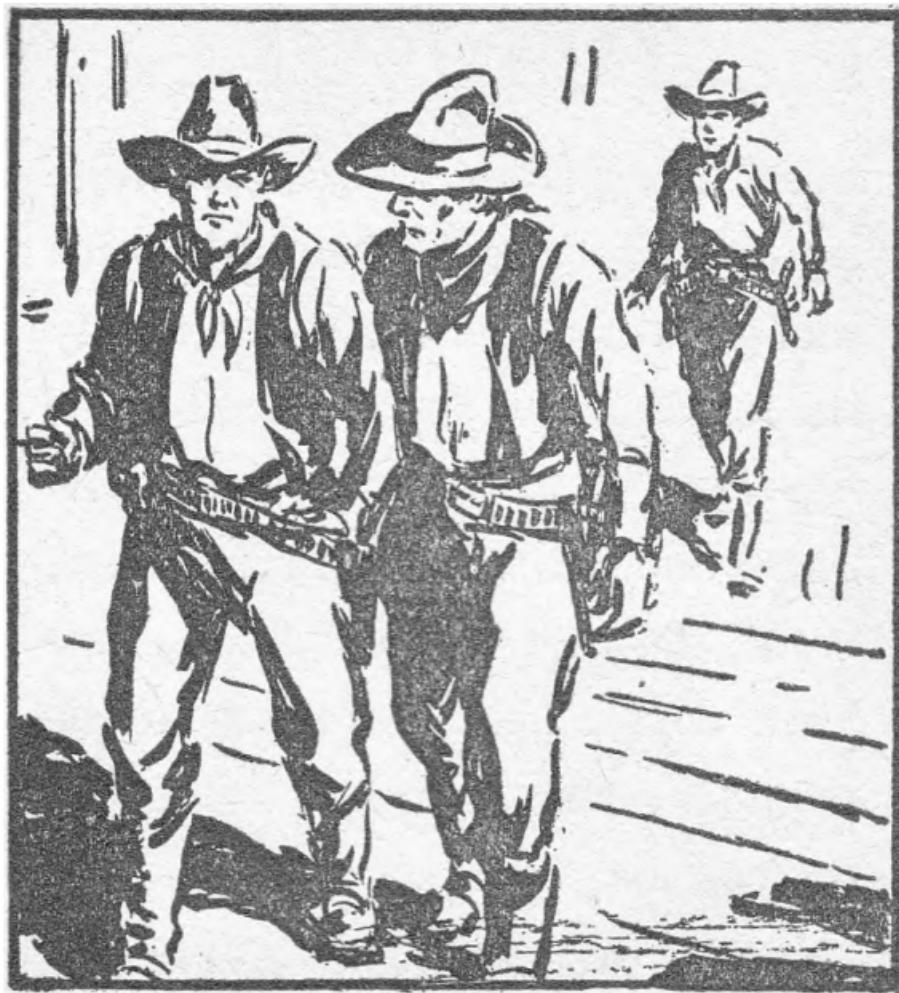
CHAPTER ONE

Was It Murder?

BUCK JONES stepped out of the restaurant in the little cowtown of Arroyo, and glanced up and down the single dusty street. On that day the street chanced to be more populous than usual. It was the first of the month, a time when cat-

tlemen came in to pay bills, restock their ranch supplies, and hobnob with each other in the bank, or in the various stores and saloons.

Buck noticed the approach of two men dressed in range clothes of better than usual quality, when a third figure caught his attention. This was a tall, slender youth of sixteen or seventeen years, rather shabbily dressed, but remarkable for the two heavy Colt's forty-fives,



Two Men Were Approaching

which hung from crossed cartridge belts and were strapped with thongs to his thighs — ordinarily the sign of an experienced gun-fighter. The other remarkable thing about the lad was the tense, crouching gait and the fixed stare with which he drew near to the two older men, who had not as yet noticed his presence.

Ten feet away, the youngster stopped dead, his arms slightly



The Youngster Stopped Dead

crooked, and his fingers brushing lightly back and forth over the walnut butts of his six-guns.

In the next three seconds many things happened.

There was a sharp challenge, twin grunts of amazement from the two cattlemen, and then a clear but strained young voice crying out:

“You dirty murderin’ coyotes—
DRAW!”



"You Murderin' Coyotes—DRAW!"

In the cattle country such words get instant action. There were four separate flashes of movement, and then the street echoed to the blended roar of heavy caliber revolvers.

First one and then the other of the two men stiffened convulsively. Then each crumpled to the ground. The trigger finger of one was still jerking bullets into the dusty street. The boy held his tense crouch while bluish feathers of



First One, Then the Other Fell

smoke drifted lazily from the muzzles of his two steady guns.

As the shocked bystanders moved forward with a chorus of angry cries, he sheathed his weapons and sprinted for a tall, roan horse tugging excitedly at a nearby hitching rack. With a jerk of the tied reins and a quick leap, the young gunfighter was in the saddle. The horse whirled, reared, and faced the still hesitant crowd.



With a Quick Leap He Was in the Saddle

But an instant before the rider could drive home his spurs, another shot blasted from the doorway behind Buck Jones. A single shot, but it knocked the boy forward onto his saddle horn as if struck with a club. Somehow he clung there, while the roan reared and plunged. Then with a sudden effort he raised his head, his glance darting toward the doorway from which the bullet had come. His slender brown hand

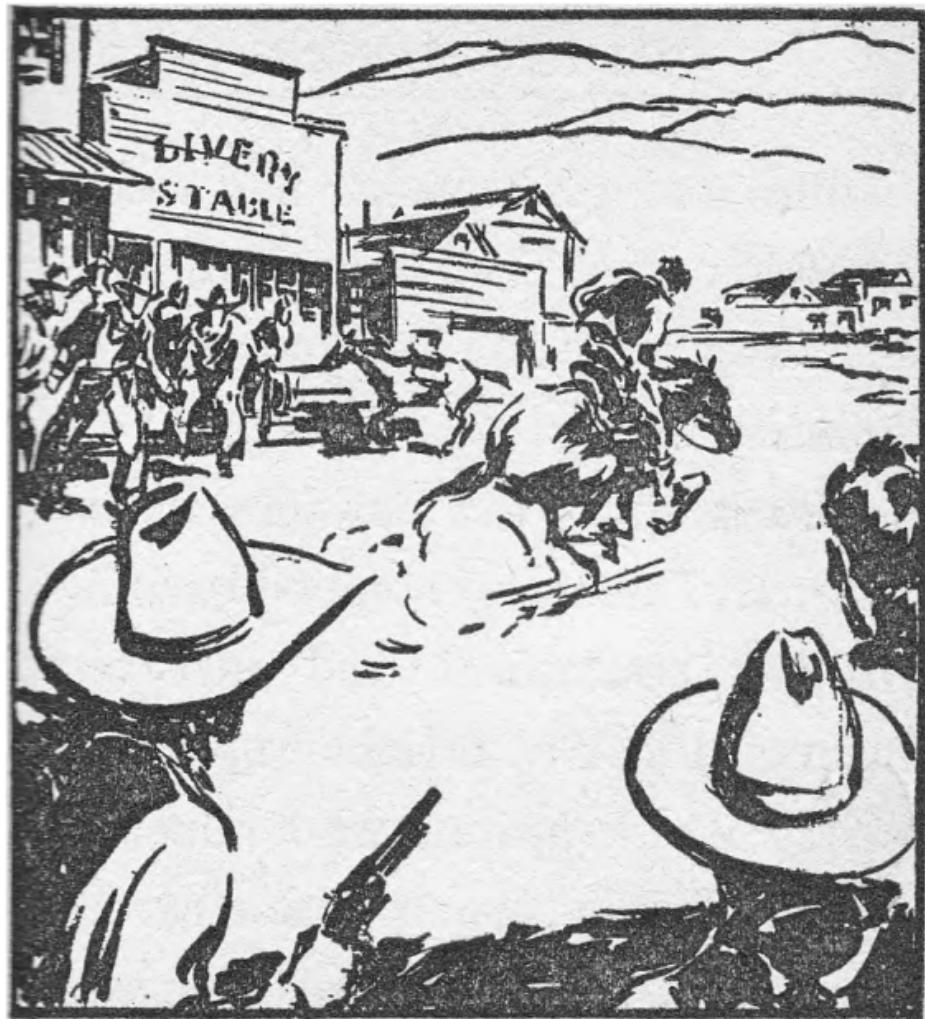


Another Shot Blasted From the Doorway

swept down and up with lightning speed.

Three more bullets cracked past Buck's ear, but this time from the opposite direction. Inside the restaurant there was a wild yell of fright or pain, while outside sounded a swift drumming of hoofs above the scared yells of the crowd.

The roan's rider was through the human cordon and half hidden in a cloud of dust far down the street,



Off in a Cloud of Dust

before a single onlooker had recovered his wits. Then came bedlam—howls, shouts, and a few useless gunshots.

Buck Jones did not join in the uproar. He merely stepped back into the restaurant and cast one scornful look at a flabby man in a dirty white apron, who hunched, terrified, in a corner, with a revolver still held shakily in loose fingers.

Evidently this coward, who had



The Man Hunched, Terrified, in a Corner

fired from shelter on the young gunfighter, had not been hit, but the kid's bullets must have come close enough to plant fear in his yellow soul. With a grunt of disgust, Buck turned back to the street, only to bump into a big-chested, grizzled man, whose gray mustache, plus the silver star pinned to his vest, indicated him to be a peace officer.

Apparently Buck had already



The Sheriff Questioned Buck

been pointed out to the Sheriff as a close witness of the shooting. The latter stepped back and said briefly:

“I guess I don’t know you, Stranger, but you was near enough to see the whole business. Just what happened?”

In terse phrases, Buck described what he had seen.

“Don’t know either of them two,” Buck concluded, indicating



Buck Described What He Had Seen

the bodies lying in the street. "Don't know the lad who shot 'em either. He brought it on, yes, but he did it fair. He gave challenge and warning, and drew his own guns only after the two men—older, both of 'em—grabbed theirs."

"Huh!" barked the Sheriff, tugging at one of his drooping mustaches. "It's murder jest the same, accordin' to the laws of this state an' county. The days have passed



"It's Murder Jest the Same."

when Judge Colt's was the only law in the territory!"

"Yeah!" Buck agreed. "I guess legally he's a murderer. But he's a game kid, just the same."

The Sheriff glowered.

"I s'pose you're hopin' he'll get away, Stranger?"

Buck smiled grimly.

"I won't go so far as to say that, Sheriff," he replied. "And I don't reckon he's going to get far any-



Buck Smiled Grimly

any six of yuh who wants to come with me right now. Go get yore hosses an' we'll trail this young gun-thrower if necessary from here to breakfast! An' you, Stranger—" he turned again to Buck. "I'll expect yuh to show up as chief witness at the inquest that'll be held here tonight on them two corpses the boys is bringin' in out of the street. Don't ferget!"

Without waiting for an answer,



The Sheriff Depufized Several Men

the gray-haired peace officer turned away to hurry the formation of his posse; and five minutes later the pursuers clattered down the street, leaving the town of Arroyo abuzz with excited comment.

Buck strolled slowly over to the big white stallion which had stood quietly through all the disturbance at the restaurant's hitching rail.

“Silver, old hoss,” he murmured, crooking an elbow over the saddle



The Pursuers Clattered Down the Street

horn, "I suppose this ain't none of our business, but somehow I feel interested. I reckon there's more to this shooting than meets the eye. That kid didn't act like a bad man, exactly. He sure gave them two birds a run for their money—no dry-gulching or shooting in the back. And there's something about him—maybe it was his voice when he called them 'murdering coyotes'—which gave me a notion he had



Buck Decided to Trail the Posse

good cause for what he did. Anyhow, Silver, you and I ain't got nothing to do right now, so suppose we just trail after that posse and see what happens."

The white horse tossed his head. Smiling thoughtfully Buck swung aboard with a jingle of polished spurs. At a smart trot he headed out of town on the trail of the young fugitive and his hunters.



He Headed out of Town

CHAPTER TWO

Buck Makes a Decision

For a space of four miles the road led southward, and then entered a rocky canyon where sandstone buttes towered abruptly above a water-carved base of brown volcanic rock; and below the road ran a deeper cut, forming the bed of a clear, narrow stream,



They Entered a Rocky Canyon

which Buck judged to be the Rock Creek he had heard mention of in Arroyo. On either side of the canyon stretched some of the worst country in a hundred square miles —a jumble of sandstone buttes and outcroppings, interspersed with loose sand and sagebrush, and with no likely water within a day's ride from the creek itself.

Buck frowned sympathetically as he thought of the small chances



▲ Jumble of Sandstone Buttes and Outcroppings

in favor of the wounded youngster ahead of him. If he kept to the road he would be overtaken as sure as the sun would set that night; and capture meant inevitably a hangman's noose. If, on the other hand, he struck over into the barren lands away from water, he would be overtaken by the even deadlier enemy—THIRST. Furthermore, it was the first of October, and the nights were cold—deadly,



Small Chances of Escape

in fact, to any poor fugitive burning with wound fever and weakened from loss of blood.

Why Buck sympathized so deeply with an apparent murderer, he himself could not tell definitely. It might be because the kid had played so fairly with his enemies, allowing them to draw before he touched his own guns. It might be that hint of passionate honesty in the boy's voice as he had branded them



Buck Urged Silver Ahead

“murdering coyotes.” Or it might be just a hunch.

Buck shrugged his broad shoulders, and urged Silver ahead.

All at once he drew rein, and sat listening to the faint shouts that echoed up the canyon from half a mile distant. Those cries could mean but one thing—the posse had lost the trail. Cuffing back his hat, Buck thought for a moment, reasoning out the pursuers’ next move.



All at Once He Drew Rein

Probably, he decided, they would scatter up and down the creek from the point where they now were, searching for the place where their quarry must have turned away. Buck determined to do likewise, but "on his own hook."

For fifteen minutes he rode Silver up and down the road without approaching appreciably nearer the posse, for he believed that if the boy had turned at all, he must



He Rode Silver Up and Down the Road

have turned higher up the trail. No sign, however, appeared in that time to Buck's trail-wise eyes.

All at once he grew conscious of an inviting sound of water trickling over its stony bed.

Dismounting, he walked to the edge of the creek, and threw himself flat to sip at the cool, pure water. Just as he finished, his eye caught a slow movement ten yards upstream.



A Slow Movement Caught His Eye

Something was floating down the current, spinning lazily. It was an old felt hat of the ten-gallon variety, and a second glance was not needed to tell Buck it was the same one he had seen on the head of a fleeing boy who rode a tall roan gelding.

“Got thirsty—just as I figured he would,” Buck divined.

The rest of the story told itself to Buck’s quick understanding.



A Ten-Gallon Hat Was Floating Down the Creek

Somewhere upstream, probably only a few yards, the wounded lad had turned away to quench his burning thirst. As he lay on the bank sucking in the life-giving fluid, his hat had fallen off. Evidently he had been too weak to reclaim it. Perhaps he was still lying there, fainting, or even half drowned with his face in the water!

In one leap, Buck had reached Silver and urged him upstream



His Hunch Had Been Correct

over the rough and broken creek bed, while his eyes missed no rock or stunted brush or spot where a horse's shoe might have left tracks. For a moment Buck had no fear of being seen by any member of the posse passing along the road, for now he was screened by the sand-stone cliffs through which the creek ran.

As he had suspected, his hunt was short. Yet when he first



They Went Upstream

glimpsed the boy's limp, hatless figure drooping over a rock, and the tall roan gelding standing nervously by, he feared that his quest had been for nothing, after all. It was only when, approaching nearer, he first caught a faint motion of breathing under the lad's torn vest that he began to hope again.

But as he swung out of the saddle, one thought struck him like a blow:—What, after all, was there



The Boy's Limp Form Lay Over a Rock

to hope for? If the youngster did not die here and now, the chances were that he would swing later at the end of a hangman's rope. Would it be any kindness to save him for that?

Buck's hesitation was only for a few seconds. Whatever the outcome, here was a life to be saved from the immediate consequences of a coward's bullet.

Quickly cutting away the blood-



The Boy Was Faintly Breathing

stained shirt and vest, Buck exposed a bullet wound piercing from back to front through the fleshy part of the shoulder.

“Clean as a whistle,” Buck murmured. “That’s luck.”

Careful examination satisfied him that the shoulder bone had been no more than nicked, if indeed the bullet had touched it at all; and by some freak of chance, no great vein or artery had been cut. The



Buck Examined the Bullet Wound

boy was suffering shock and a certain loss of blood; still Buck believed there was a fair chance of saving him if he could have shelter and rest and constant nursing.

Where, though, could these things be had for a fugitive whose hunters were even now closing in, unless his would-be rescuer would turn him over to those hunters, who would keep him only for later execution? Buck admitted that the



It Was up to Buck to Save Him

problem was solely and simply up to him; and never had he faced a harder decision.

At last, however, that hunch or sentiment which had first led him to the plucky youngster, won the argument. Guilty or not, the kid had made a brave fight, and it would be cowardly to turn him over to his enemies now that he was helpless.

Seeing that the worst bleeding



Buck Had a Difficult Decision to Make

had stopped, Buck left, and scouted up and down the creek for a hundred yards in each direction. There was no sign of the posse, and nothing but a distant shouting to indicate that the hunt was still on.

There would be time for what he had to do.

On returning, he pulled a clean shirt from his own saddle bag. Then, with cool water from the creek, he washed and dressed the



He Pulled a Clean Shirt From His Saddle Bag

senseless lad's shoulder. After some difficulty, he made his patient drink more creek water, while he himself thought out the next step in the course he had undertaken.

Some temporary hiding-place must be found at once, for within the next hour this particular part of the canyon might be swarming with Sheriff's deputies. The boy would have to be moved, whatever the danger to his wound, and, after



Buck Forced the Water Down His Throat

examining once more the tight bandages he had made, Buck decided there would be no great risk. He dared not use one of the horses, however, as jolting over the rough boulders might start bleeding afresh. And the horses must be got out of sight.

It was half an hour before Buck found a narrow gulch leading into the canyon from the desert country to the east. Up this he rode at the



Looking for a Hiding Place

best speed Silver could make, leading the tall roan behind.

In ten minutes the gulch leveled out into barren sand flats. Looking carefully around, Buck was able to discover no sign of any other rider.

“So far, so good!” he said with satisfaction.

The next thing was to find some draw or cranny among the scarred buttes which rose immediately to his right. Not a permanent hiding-



There Was No Sign of the Posse

place—that would have to be found later. The need of the moment was for temporary concealment.

Luck played straight into Buck's hands. Between the two nearest buttes he found a narrow draw which bent sharply to the left and ended in a steep cut or "chimney," weather-carved into the soft sandstone. Best of all, out of sight from the flats, the draw held bunches of coarse buffalo grass.



A Temporary Hiding Place

“Enough to feed our two hosses for a while,” he decided.

After hobbling the animals and stretching his lariat across the narrow bend of the draw to serve for a fence, he hurried anxiously back down the canyon to the point where he had left the young outlaw.

To his great relief, the pursuit seemed to have come no nearer. Clearly, the posse was spread out on both sides into the barren coun-



Buck Hurried Anxiously Back

try from a point much farther down the canyon, and this gave Buck the time he sorely needed—to carry his patient in his arms over the difficult going of the creek bed. Haste, and the resultant danger of a bad fall, must be avoided, if possible. Besides, even the weight of the boy's slender body was enough to tax the wind of a strong man during the climb out of the canyon.



He Carried His Patient Carefully

It was a half hour before sunset when Buck finally laid his burden down at the head of the hidden draw, only to hurry back with both canteens and a quart coffee pot for more water from the creek.

He made the trip quickly, though with due caution, and was thankful that the way back would be under cover of darkness. On his return, he noticed with alarm that a chill wind had sprung up, and that the



Buck Went After More Water

boy's fever had mounted rapidly. This meant immediate use of half the precious water, and a fire to be built before this fever attack should be followed by a chill. Moreover, the bandages must be looked to again.

It was two hours later before Buck found a chance to cook a much-needed supper for himself over his hidden sagebrush fire, and take stock of his present situatio-



The Boy's Fever Mounted Rapidly

CHAPTER THREE

Covered!

The chances were that his lucky find of this almost perfect hiding place would allow him to keep his patient quiet for the next few days before a longer flight could be undertaken unless some member of the posse should chance upon the draw.



Buck Took Stock of the Situation

The next question was provisions. A small amount of flour and bacon remained in Buck's own saddle roll, and that of the young outlaw proved to be even better supplied. But the various items were simply rough, staple foods carried by any cowboy on a journey. They would do for Buck, and, with care, he could make them last a week; but when his patient recovered enough strength to eat, he could



He Was in a Difficult Position

not be fed simply on beans and biscuits and bacon. Fresh meat would be welcome, but to get it would mean using a rifle or pistol, which would surely give away the secret of their hiding-place.

Buck saw plainly that sooner or later he would have to make a cautious trip to town, and probably take by stealth what he dared not purchase openly.

“Sheriff’ll be looking for me, I



Sooner or Later He Would Have to Go

reckon," he told Silver, with a wry chuckle. "Told me not to miss his inquest, he did, and here we are not attending it at all."

Buck was sure he would be recognized and suspected of connection with the young gunfighter.

However, perhaps certain other questions could be answered with less trouble. One of these was the boy's identity and purpose in coming to Arroyo. As his protect-



Sheriff'll Be Looking for Me." He Said

Buck felt that he had every right to know this much, and he guessed that the answer might be found somewhere in the saddle bags or clothing that he had piled carefully beside the fire.

After finishing his meal and scouring the few tin dishes with clean sand, Buck turned to his search without more delay. Besides the food supplies already mentioned, he noted the usual scanty ou-



Buck Looked Through the Saddle Bags

fit carried by an ordinary puncher on the trail: a change of socks, an extra bandana, two blankets, extra ammunition for his two big Colts, a roll of cord, a set of leather hobbles for the roan horse, a small bottle of gun-oil and a scrap of cleaning rag, three feet of haywire—and down in the toe of one saddlebag two crumpled wads of paper.

Drawing these out last, Buck saw that they were two letters:



Withdrew Two Crumpled Wads of Paper.

their envelopes, much stained and fingered. Both were addressed to Dave Fallon, Turkey Track Ranch, Red Rock, Arizona, and both bore the Red Rock postmark of ten days ago.

After one thoughtful glance at the delirious youth tossing in his blanket, Buck drew out the contents of the two envelopes, and read them by the light of the fire.

No question remained now as to

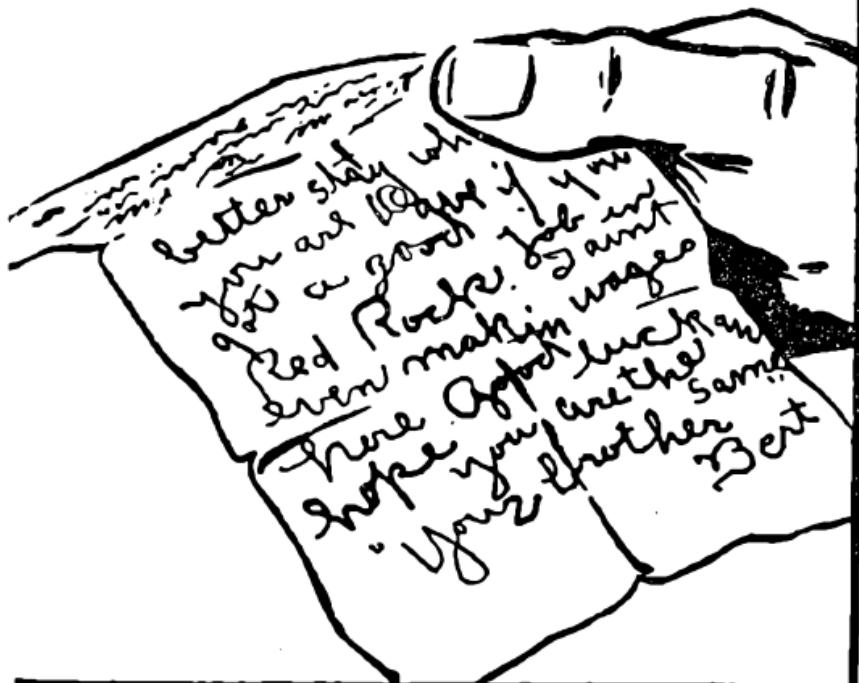


 **Read the Letters by the Light of the Fire**

the identity of the wounded youngster. The first letter ran in an irregular, scrawling hand:—

“Dear Dave,

“I haven’t written you before cause things have been pretty tough here on Uncle Asa’s ranch. Everythin’ run down an’ big debts. I been workin’ in day an’ night but things ain’t pickin’ up much yet. Better stay where you are Dave if you got a good job in Red Rock. I aint even



The Letter Was Written in a Scrawling Hand

makin wages here. Good luck an
hope you are the same.

“Your brother Bert.”

A second letter written in a stiff
clerky fashion, ran as follows:—

“Mr. David Fallon

“Turkey Track Ranch

“Red Rock, Arizona.

“Dear Mr. Fallon:

“If you will come immediately to
see me at the Astoria Restaurant
Arroyo, Wyoming, you will learn



✉ Letters Were Addressed to Dave Fallon

something to your interest. But you must keep this letter a secret from everybody. Your brother Bert disappeared about a year ago, that is when he first showed up in these parts, and one of the men responsible for what happened to him is now taking his name and has claimed your Uncle's ranch. This is news to you. In any case, I don't think you will want to delay in finding out the truth for yourself.

Mr. Wm. T. Gandy
Tandy Ranch
Redmond, Oregon
Dear Mr.

The Letter Contained Alarming News

I advise you to come immediately. I have just discovered the plot which made away with your brother, and know who was in it.

“Yours truly,

“Joseph Griege.

“P. S. Burn this letter as soon as you read it.”

Buck stood gazing blankly at the fire and trying to imagine some reason for the conflict in these two messages.



Buck Gazed Blankly at the Fire

Of course, the first thing the letters suggested was that the false Bert Fallon had written one of the letters, but somehow Buck could not feel that any man in his right senses would be so foolish as to write a letter which the receiver must instantly recognize as a forgery. Of course, there was the chance that Dave Fallon was unable to read, or was known never to have seen his brother's handwriting.



Buck Was Puzzled

But that was too long a chance to be likely, and the boy, now tossing and moaning in his blanket at Buck's feet, did not give the impression of being too ignorant to read or write. The very fact that he had kept the letters argued against this.

The second note, the one signed by Joseph Grieger, made more sense in view of the shooting Buck had witnessed twelve hours before.



The Boy Began to Moan

It was a good guess that Dave had responded to the letters by riding north from Arizona as fast as possible, and, learning who his brother's enemies were, had promptly shot it out with them.

Joseph Grieger, who gave his address as the Astoria Restaurant—Buck started suddenly.

“That was the coyote who fired at Dave Fallon here from cover in the doorway!” Buck remembered.



Suddenly He Knew!

“And he wore a dirty white apron!”

Could this man have been the writer of the letter? If so, what foul sort of treachery had been committed?

Scowling blackly, Buck turned and walked a short distance away from the dying campfire.

“Something ‘specially rotten is behind this whole mess,” he muttered to himself.

Yet the rottenness did not see-



Buck Muttered Angrily to Himself

by any stretch of the facts in hand, to attach itself to the wounded boy he had saved. After all, Buck told himself, his instinct had been right in coming to Dave Fallon's rescue and, having done this much, he promised silently then and there to go through with it until the youngster had his rights, or, at the very worst, had made good his escape.

For the moment there was nothing further to do. Buck dared not



Buck Promised Silently to Help the Boy

leave his patient alone while the wound fever still raged. Drawing off his boots and loosening his belt he rolled up in blankets and dozed with "one eye open"—alert for any sound or motion on the boy's part.

It was not until noon on the following day that Dave's fever left him, and he sank into a deep, sound sleep, after waking once to drink nearly all the remaining water supply.



Jack Decided on a Little "Shut-Eye"

Buck cooked and ate his camp meals alone; and it was just as he was finishing an evening snack on cold food that he experienced a sudden very bad moment.

A faint but calm voice behind him spoke evenly and distinctly.

“Reach fer the stars, hommin’ whoever yuh be! an’ face ‘em slow! I got yuh covered!”



Buck Cooked Himself a Meal

CHAPTER FOUR

Getting an Earful

Obeying the quiet command. Buck raised his hands and hunched around to look straight into the gaping mouth of a Colt's revolver, which Dave Fallon was holding steadily on his belt buckle.

“I reckon yuh must be plumb careless, Mister,” the boy whis-



Buck Received a Surprise

pered. "It ain't never safe to take a man—even wounded—unless yuh take his guns too. Now, reach down careful an' unbuckle yore gunbelt."

Buck did so with a grin, and then started to raise his hands again, but the boy's pistol hand had fallen to the blanket beneath him.

"Jest step back about ten foot, an' then yuh can put down yore hands. I reckon I got strength enough to shoot yuh if yuh make a



“Unbuckle Yore Gunbelt!” the Boy Ordered

funny move," he said.

The youngster sighed wearily.

"All right! Let's talk!" he urged.

"You must be a mind-reader, Dave," smiled Buck. "I was going to suggest a bit of talking. Get it out of your head that I'm a Sheriff's man, 'cause I sort of kidnapped you away from them yesterday when I found you lying back there by the creek."

For a moment Dave's eyes met



“All Right! Let’s Talk!”

Buck's with searching intensity. Then they closed, and another long sigh, this time of relief, passed his pale lips.

“I guess yore talkin’ straight, Stranger,” he whispered after a pause. “An’ I’m afeared there ain’t nothin’ I could do if yuh was lyin’. I couldn’t even lift my gun to shoot if I had to. So speak yore piece. First off, tell me how yuh come to know my handle.”



The Boy Sighed Wearily

Buck picked up the nearly empty canteen, and, raising the boy's head, drained the last drop into his throat before answering. Then, as he tucked the blankets closer, he said:

“I guess I'll have to ask you to pardon me for opening your private correspondence, Dave. But I reckon that since I'd butted into your business far enough to risk my neck in helping a wanted man



Buck Picked up the Canteen

get away, I had some right to know what it was all about. Besides, you weren't in no shape to tell me yourself last night. Yes, I read both of them letters, and I sure would appreciate your telling me what they mean—if you don't mind."

Buck had been looking away as he talked, but, getting no reply for a full minute, he glanced down to find that his patient had fallen into a heavy coma of exhaustion. Scarce-



The Boy Was Exhausted

ly surprised, Buck nodded, and placed another blanket under the boy's head.

Then he picked up the two canteens and a quart pot, and set off down the draw. The sun would go down in a few minutes, making it safe to approach the canyon creek for more water.

On his return trip, Buck decided that there should be no delay now in paying a visit to Arroyo. Dav-



Soon It Would Be Safe to Go

Fallon could be left safely for a few hours now that the fever had gone, and in the morning he would probably awake hungry. The last scrap of his spare shirt had been used for bandages, and fresh ones were urgently needed. Besides, there was the matter of special food to build up quickly the boy's wasted strength.

Without disturbing Dave, Buck quietly mounted Silver as soon as



Buck Quietly Mounted Silver

darkness had become thick, and set off in a wide half circle to enter Arroyo from the opposite side. On the day of the shooting he had happened to notice a neat, white cottage at this end of town with a painted placard on the door:

A. E. "DOC" BRONSON, M. D.

The familiar and slightly humorous "Doc" seemed to Buck a good omen, suggesting a man with homely human sympathies.



“Doc” Bronson’s Cottage

After tying Silver in a little gulch near the outskirts, Buck proceeded on foot to the rear of "Doc" Bronson's cottage, and crept close to the lighted window, which he hoped would prove to be the office. His guess was right.

A chubby, gray-haired man sat beside a battered desk talking to a patient. The latter was a lank cowboy, who, as he talked, kept rubbing his stomach with a pained ex-



He Crept Close to the Lighted Window

pression on his face. Buck laughed softly to himself as he recognized another victim of cow-country cooking. Like so many punchers whose three meals a day came out of a frying pan, this lank cowpoke had a case of chronic indigestion. Buck was sure of it when the doctor pulled out a bottle of pink pills and gave them to his visitor, who thanked him and went out.

Buck waited until fairly sur-



Buck Watched From Outside

that no more patients were going to arrive. Then, stepping boldly to the front door, he knocked.

The little doctor opened almost at once, and welcomed with a merry chuckle what he thought was another patient.

“Well, what’s yore grief, young feller?” he asked, leading the way into his back office. “Pills or liniment? That’s about all they comes to me for, ‘cept when they’re gur-



Buck Knocked Boldly

shot, an' you sure don't look bad hurt."

Buck took a chair opposite Bronson's desk and cuffed back his hat. He rapidly sized up the little medico. Here was a man with plenty of human kindness, certainly, and probably much common sense. His twinkling eyes and jolly round face invited confidence. Buck went straight to the point.

"Doc," he said abruptly, "if yo-



He Had Twinkling Eyes and a Jolly Face

had your choice between saving a man's life and turning him over to the law for hanging, which would you do—providing, of course, you had a hunch the fellow's life might be worth saving?"

For ten seconds Bronson returned Buck's honest look, and then bobbed his head cheerfully.

"I see!" he replied. "Yore the stranger who didn't show up at the inquest last night. I guess the lif-



"Tore the Stranger Who Didn't Show Up."

you speak of belongs to a quick-shootin' youngster who got away yesterday with a bullet in his carcass. I s'pose he's hidin' out somewhere's a few hours ride from here. I like yore looks, Stranger, even if you act queer, an' I'm inclined to gamble with you that the life may be worth a mite of trying. Anyway, I hate the sight of a rope. What do you want me to do? Ride out to see this 'two-gun kid' tonight?"



"Doc" Bronson Was Willing to Help

Buck shook his head slowly.

“No, Doc,” he answered. “Under some conditions I might ask you to, but it ain’t necessary. That don’t mean that I’m afraid to take a chance and trust you, ’cause I liked your looks first off. But I don’t like to put the responsibility of helping a wanted man on anybody else.”

He paused, and again the little medico bobbed his head.

“I get you, Stranger. The sen-
-



Buck Told Him What He Needed

ment does you credit. Now what can I do?"

"Bandages, Doc, and some stuff to kill germs, and the kind of food that'll help a wounded man get well lots quicker than beans and bacon will. I'll pay you spot cash, and whatever you ask," Buck offered. "It's plain that I can't go into town myself and buy it at a store, 'cause someone might remember me 'way back to yesterday."



"I'll Pay You Spot Cash."

The doctor said nothing for five minutes, but he employed the time hustling about his office, his pantry, and various other storage places collecting such an array of cans, and jars, and bottles—not to mention half a roast and a freshly baked pie—that Buck finally stopped him with a word of protest.

“Listen, Doc,” he laughed. “I ain’t telling you to call a halt for fear I ain’t got the dough to pay for



The Doc Produced More Than Enough

all this, 'cause I have! But you're cleaning yourself plumb out of grub. You won't have enough left for breakfast if you don't lay off. Now tell me how much I owe you."

The little medico broke into one of his merry chuckles.

"Anythin' you like, Friend. Is ten dollars too much?"

"Huh! Call it twenty," snorted Buck, peeling off a bill from a roll. "And now, if you don't mind, a lit-



"Call It Twenty," Snorted Buck

tle inside information might go good. Do you know a ranny who calls himself Bert Fallon?"

The doctor looked up, round eyed.

"Of course I do!" he chirruped. "Bert Fallon was one of the fellers yore two-gun kid shot dead in the street yesterday noon. The other man was his foreman, an' between you an' me, I'd say good riddanc to both of 'em!"



The Doctor Looked up, Round Eyed

“Huh! Maybe that explains something that’s been bothering me. Could you say when this Fallon bird came to these parts?” Buck inquired.

“Well, Stranger, there ain’t much to tell. He came here ’bout a year back. He was left the Flyin’-F ranch by his uncle, Asa Fallon. Anyhow, he made that claim good, brought his foreman with him, an’ straight off fired most of the ol’



The Doctor Told All He Knew

hands. The crew he got in was mostly hard-case punchers from other states. Not a friendly bunch, nor the sort you'd put yore trust in, exactly."

The doctor paused thoughtfully, and crossed his legs.

"The Flyin'-F kind of surprised Arroyo by buildin' up its herds way beyond the stock that old Asa used to run, an' there's somethin' funny 'bout that, even 'sposin' Ber-



"There's Somethin' Funny 'Bout That."

Fallon had considerable money to invest," he explained. "You see, Greasy Joe Grieger, who owns the Astoria Restaurant, owns plenty other property hereabouts—which he got by foreclosin' on mortgages. Everybody expected he'd foreclose on the Flyin'-F, too. I'm sure he was just goin' to do it when Asa died. Why he'd favor a stranger like this Bert fellow is a mystery that's been plenty talked about.



Buck Listened Attentively

There's even been a rumor that Grieger was loanin' more cash to Bert Fallon, 'stead of doin' his old foreclosin' trick — an' generosity ain't never been one of Greasy Joe's weak points!"

Buck whistled softly.

"That's all I know, Stranger," the physician concluded. "This much has been public property for quite a spell, so yore welcome to it for what it's worth!"



"That's All I Know, Stranger."

Buck was silent for a moment. Then he turned and picked up his bundle.

"Thanks plenty, Doc," he said gripping Bronson's hand. "I don't know which we owe you most for me and the kid, this here dope about Fallon or the medicine and stuff. I reckon we can use both to good purpose unless we're plumb out of luck. Good night, and thanks again!"

CHAPTER FIVE

The Fight in the Draw

Buck's ride back to the hidden draw was as uneventful as his arrival. Young Dave was still asleep, and Buck waked him only enough to administer a pint of hot beef broth. Then Buck sought his own blankets.

In the morning the wounded man

had his first hearty meal. Seeing his patient's strength greatly improved, Buck decided that the following night would be spent somewhere else if a change of location could possibly be managed.

An hour's scouting through the sagebrush near their hideout had shown him three or four distant riders, proving that the Sheriff's manhunters had not yet given up the search. It was almost a miracle



They Had Not Given up the Search.

that they had not already discovered the fugitives' hiding-place.

The remainder of the day, until about six o'clock, Buck spent chiefly on lookout duty, returning at intervals only to prepare food for the boy. He did not even bother to shift the horses' feeding ground, as all the grass behind the concealing rocks had already been eaten.

Just as the day was drawing to an end, Buck heard voices and the



On Lookout Duty

clink of iron shoes. These sounds told him that several riders had come up unexpectedly alongside the butte where he lay watching. Almost certainly their next move would be to investigate the little draw where Dave Fallon lay helpless beside the two tethered horses.

As a matter of fact, they were entering the mouth now.

“Got to act quick,” Buck told himself, “or we’re holed up sure.”



The Riders Were Approaching

Silent and swift as a rock snake, he crept over the wind-scoured top of the butte, and then down its flank to a high, narrow ledge he had marked. Even then he would have been too late, except that the four riders, which he could now see, had halted, and were grouped together, apparently arguing.

Scarcely had Buck reached the ledge whose lip overhung the side of the draw when the riders stop-



A Plan Had Formed in Buck's Mind

ped their talk and rode on, still in a close bunch. They were passing directly under Buck's ledge, which was only a matter of six feet above their heads.

"Hold it, you hombres! You're covered. Reach for the sky!"

Instinctively, the four men pulled up their horses at Buck's shout. Three of them reluctantly raised their empty hands, and turned to locate the unknown voice.

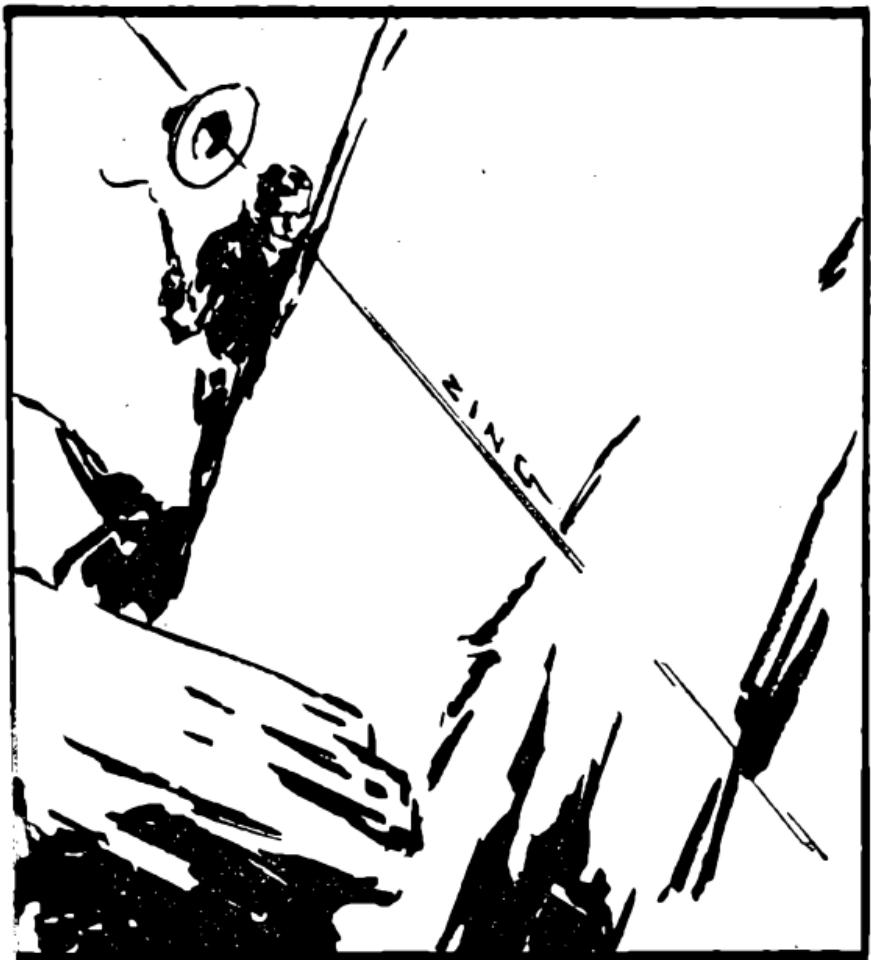


They Stopped at a Sudden Command

But the fourth, a wiry little man, had spotted the brim of Buck's pearl-gray hat. Pretending to raise his hands, he had suddenly filled his fists with two blazing guns.

Buck's hat jumped from his head, rock splinters cut his cheek, and in the same instant the other three made to draw their guns.

Buck's action was swifter than anything even the little marks-



Buck's Hat Jumped From His Head

man's eye could follow. With one mighty kick he launched himself straight out and down at the nearest man's head. There was a thud of bodies as two men and a horse went down in dusty mêlée.

Before the other riders could blink that dust from their eyes, a second man tumbled from his horse, crippled by a blow from Buck's revolver butt.

Two other guns roared. The re-



He Launched Himself Straight Out

maining posse men had fired blindly into the confusion, but their bullets found only horse flesh. One of them sprawled as his mount rolled over, and the other suddenly found himself facing Buck's leveled forty-fives.

“Fall off, you, and don’t lower your hands till they touch grit!”

Gasp ing, the man obeyed; and, as soon as they had struggled up, the other three bewildered men



Buck Had the Situation Well in Hand

reached automatically for the sky.

“That’s better!”

Buck, hatless, dust covered, with a thin stream of red trickling from his cut cheek, was a grim enough figure to startle the bravest.

“Unbuckle your gun-belts, you hombres! Take off your boots. All right turn around and forward march till you-all get out of sight,” Buck told them meaningly. “If you head anywheres except toward Ar-



The Men Began Their Long March

royo, you won't never get there."

The four men said nothing. There was nothing to say.

Without a word the four men turned and stumbled out of the draw in their sock feet, unarmed and helpless.

Buck followed for a hundred yards. Then he stood and watched until the last figure had disappeared over a distant rise of ground before he turned back to find his hat.



Buck Watched Them out of Sight

It lay at the base of the ledge from which he had leaped. Eying the two black holes in its dented crown, he put it on with a savage jerk. Luck had been with him again, but Death had come just a little too close for comfort.

Now he realized that the sick boy must be moved, whatever the risk. He would give the disarmed men an hour at best to make contact with their friends. After that, if



He Eyed the Two Bullet Holes

he and young Dave were not well away with their trail covered, there could be only one outcome — the rope for one, and possibly for both.

Hurrying back to camp, Buck found Dave already awakened by the recent gunfire. He was full of unspoken questions which the Western cowboy's code of courtesy would not let him put into words.

Buck, on his part, was not much more outspoken.



He Hurried Back to Dave

“All right for a spell, pardner,” he said. “I got the drop on four of ‘em, and took their guns and boots. They’re headed for Arroyo now. But we’ve got to ride pronto. Think you can make it?”

“Uh-huh. Get me into the saddle an’ I’m good fer twenty mile. Guess you’ll have to saddle up fer me, though.”

Five minutes later, the two riders with their full saddlebags left



The Two Riders Left the Hidden Draw

the little hidden draw at the best pace the boy's wounded shoulder could stand.

Already the shadows were lengthening from the base of the buttes, for barely an hour of sunlight remained. It was to these shadows that the riders clung as closely as possible, not knowing at what moment a shout or shots from suddenly appearing possemen might hail their discovery.

CHAPTER SIX

The Box Canyon

“Trouble is,” Buck muttered, as the two men rode stirrup to stirrup, “we don’t neither of us know this country at all. For all we can guess there may be no water for forty miles, except Rock Creek, and that ain’t precisely safe just now, what with the Sheriff’s boys raising

dust all around. On the other hand, there may be some water-hole or spring hid away behind one of these here buttes. We got to chance it, I reckon, and we can't risk any long ride yet with that hole in your shoulder not hardly closed. Them bandages tight enough?"

"Why—yeah, I reckon so."

The boy's words came slowly through clenched teeth.

"Ain't hardly no feelin' there



“We Got to Chance It.”

now," he added. "Jest kind o' numb. But don't think I ain't good fer a long ride, pardner! Which reminds me, yuh ain't told me yore monicker."

Buck laughed shortly, admiring the lad's nerve. The wound must have been giving him torment, as Buck well knew.

"I'd plumb forgot," he answered. "It's Buck Jones—plain 'Buck' to my friends. But look over there,



"Look Over There, Pardner."

pardner. Get the line of them two farthest buttes?"

The boy looked and nodded.

"Looks to me like they both run west about the same height for three to four miles," Buck continued. "Small mesas, you'd call 'em down Texas way, I reckon. See how they close in together after a couple miles? Somehow, Dave, I got a hunch there's where we ought to head to. There should be lots of



They Headed Toward the Mesas

draws and little pocket canyons over there, with good hard going as you come close to 'em, where our hosses won't leave no tracks. If we find one of them hideaway holes that's got a small spring in it, that's right where we want to get to. Of course, some hunting deputy might blunder on us, or even track us there—with luck."

"But we still got our guns," the young man gritted between his



Little Pocket Canyons

teeth, "an' there ain't no use worryin' 'bout what might happen till it does!"

Buck Jones smiled in agreement.

The shadows cast by the buttes were lengthening rapidly now, spreading and blending with each other like flowing splashes of ink upon the sun-reddened desert. It became easier for the riders to avoid crossing sunlit patches. When finally they turned into the nar-



The Shadows Were Lengthening

row valley between the two long mesas Buck had pointed out, the darkness hid them completely.

Had it not been for Dave's increasing weakness, and the need to travel over the rockiest ground the horses could manage in order to avoid leaving tracks, Buck would have hurried the pace. As it was, he must ride knee to knee with the wounded boy, who seemed about to topple from the saddle with every



Buck Rode Knee to Knee With the Boy

lurch of his mount. If the roan should stumble, nothing but Buck's quick arm could save the lad a dangerous fall.

The one encouraging fact was that there was no sign of pursuit. Indeed, pursuit by the best of trackers would have been more or less guesswork in the darkness.

As it happened, Dave Fallon managed to sit his horse for the four miles dangerous riding until



There Was No Sign of Pursuit

Buck's eye caught a blacker streak in the flank of the nearer mesa.

"Pardner," he murmured, "maybe that little cut in the rocks is just what we're looking for. Anyhow, I won't risk your riding farther, sick as you be. We'll turn in here—hold on, now! We've got to cross some loose rock, and there's liable to be more farther up."

But young Dave was already "holding tight." Indeed, as he



Loose Rock Blocked Their Path

clung, with closed eyes and set teeth, to the saddle horn, his clutch seemed as rigid as a death grip. The boy was really unconscious in his saddle, and Buck had to lead the roan as they entered the narrow cleft.

For perhaps fifty yards a tiny canyon twisted around bends and angles cut by water action, years ago, in the soft sandstone. The farther they advanced, the more



Buck Had to Lead the Roan

Buck hoped to find some spring or water seepage.

The little canyon ended abruptly where three sheer walls came together, and, as he sprang to the ground, Buck felt through his boot soles the welcome springiness of grass and damp ground. Muffling a shout of joy, he stepped quickly to Dave's side. Prying the clenched fingers from the saddle horn, Buck lifted Fallon gently to the ground.



He Stepped Quickly to Dave's Side

It was pitch dark in the tiny pocket they had entered; indeed, if the moon had been up no light could have penetrated through except from straight overhead. Buck moved between the walls of sand-stone by touch alone.

Having at last managed to wrap his limp burden in a blanket and lay him safely in the corner away from the horses' feet, he struck a match to a stub of candle taken



The Candle Burned Steadily

from a saddle pocket. Since all wind was cut off by the twisting and bending of the narrow passage through which they had come, the candle burned as steadily as in a closed room, and so narrow was the space it lighted that Buck could see from wall to wall without any trouble.

Again he barely repressed a cry of satisfaction, for the floor of the little canyon was covered with



Buck Could See From Wall to Wall

bunch grass, some of it green where the spring water reached its roots. Here was food for the two horses, out of sight of prowling hunters. Furthermore, if their refuge should be discovered its narrowness provided a good chance for effective defense.

The only two drawbacks, Buck realized, were, first, that there seemed to be no way of getting out except through the single narrow



Here Was Food for the Two Horses

entrance, and, second, that all fuel for cooking and warmth must be found outside the canyon and carried back.

However, Buck Jones was not a man to criticize his good luck. After the moon came up, he would return to the outer valley and bring back a few armfuls of sage stems for a fire.

Returning now to Dave, he examined the bandages by the light



He Gathered Sage Stems for a Fire

of his half-burned candle. Then he counted the boy's pulse and felt his forehead for signs of fever. His breath of relief showed that he found no serious harm had come from the long ride.

Aside from attending to the horses and bringing firewood, there was nothing more to be done till morning. With daylight, some way might be found to strengthen their defenses.



He Counted the Boy's Pulse

CHAPTER SEVEN

Snaked From the Saddle

Morning saw Dave Fallon greatly refreshed.

"I got the appetite of a lobo wolf," he said.

His wound pained him less, and the boy insisted on helping cook breakfast over the fragrantly burning sage stems.



Dave Helped Cook Breakfast

During the cooking of the meal Buck managed to draw out for the first time Dave's own story which, up to now, there had been no time or opportunity to tell. In the main, Dave's information fitted with that given by Doc Bronson.

The boy had known of his brother's inheritance from old Asa Fallon, and had received a letter from Bert a year ago saying that he was on his way to take over the ranch



Dave Told His Story

near Arroyo. Somewhat to his surprise, no other message had come until two weeks ago, when Dave had received the note Buck found in his saddlebag.

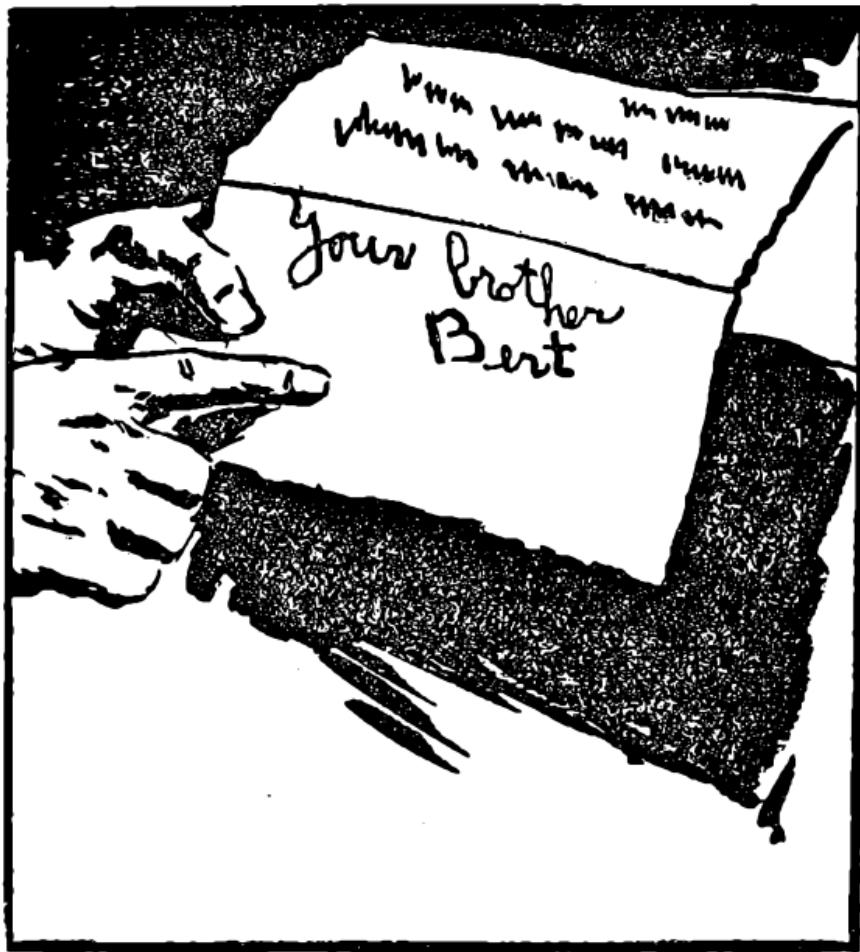
The boy admitted that the handwriting looked like his brother's and had it not been for Grieger's letter arriving at the same time, he would not have examined it more closely. Buck, with his suspicions already aroused too, did



The Handwriting Looked Like His Brother's

not take long to see that the letter was a forgery.

Dave had ridden north as fast as possible and immediately tackled Grieger, who told him he had learned how two men, Montana Pete Dillon and Bronc Hardy, had made away with the real Bert Fallon before the latter had left Arizona. Then, taking Bert's name, Montana Pete had claimed the Fallon ranch.



The Letter Was a Forgery

Grieger did not reveal how he had learned this, but he promised to point out to Dave the two murderers of his brother as soon as they passed the restaurant. This he had done as agreed, with the results already told.

Buck, in his turn, now repeated Bronson's story. Some minutes later he asked casually:

"Did Grieger happen to tell you where your uncle's ranch is?"



Buck Repeated Bronson's Story

“Uh-huh,” the boy nodded. “He said it was ‘bout ten mile north from Arroyo. Ranch an’ outbuildin’s built out of cottonwood, chinked with plaster. A good-lookin’ spread, runnin’ some five thousand head of cows an’ a couple hundred hosses, good water an’ feed the year ‘round. But Grieger didn’t say nothin’ ‘bout holdin’ no mortgages on it. Course he wouldn’t!”

“No, I guess not,” Buck agreed.



“A Good-Lookin’ Spread.”

“And now, pardner, if you’ve got the appetite you were talking about a few minutes back, just pull up the chair that you ain’t got, and fall to! Coffee’s boiling now and there’s a cup right beside you.”

“By the great horn spoon, Buck! Yuh sure ARE a cook! My mouth’s been a-waterin’ with the smell o’ breakfast fer the last quarter hour.”

Three hearty meals combined



“Coffee’s Boiling Now.”

with the weakness of his convalescence made Dave sleep most of that day, and Buck had several hours to himself for thinking out a program.

After turning various schemes over in his mind, he decided there was just one answer to the problem. Somehow, a written confession of the whole plot must be forced from Greasy Joe Grieger and placed in the hands of the District



Buck Was in Deep Thought

Attorney. This job promised to be both dangerous and difficult, but once it was accomplished, Dave's troubles would be over. At the same time, Buck himself, would be cleared of any blame for helping the Two-Gun Kid, as the lad was now definitely christened in Buck's mind.

After a glance at the boy, whose sleeping form lay revealed in the red glow of their supper fire, Buck



Dave Was Asleep

decided there was no reason for delay in putting the first part of his plan into operation. If he started at once he would arrive before midnight at the Fallon ranch, a distance of less than twenty miles. There, if his hunch proved correct, he would find the man he was after.

According to Buck's reckoning, Greasy Joe Grieger would have lost no time in claiming the ranch on some excuse or other and would



Buck Started at Once

now be superintending a change of management there. Either that, or he would be busy counting the stock and appraising the property for profitable sale. If the moneymen were to be captured at all, it would best be done at the ranch, instead of at Grieger's own quarters in town.

Buck looked up at the sky.

“Tonight is going to be clear,” he observed. “Air’s not cold down



He Looked up at the Sky

at the bottom of this little pocket canyon and Dave'll be all right. I'll just throw another blanket over him and put more wood on the fire. I'll be back before daylight."

Quietly saddling Silver, Buck led him through the dark, winding cut of the little canyon, mounting only when he had reached the broader valley between the two mesas. From there he rode more rapidly keeping to the shadows cast by a



Buck Led Silver Through the Dark

pale crescent moon.

“I don’t think any Sheriff’s men will be moseying around here tonight, Silver, old hoss,” he murmured into the stallion’s back-pricked ear, “but your color will show up too bright if you get out into the moonlight. If we just stick close to these buttes, I reckon we’ll be safe enough till we swing north to get around Arroyo.”

But it was this very precaution



Buck Rode Close to the Buttes

of Buck's which brought disaster. Silver was picking his way carefully along the edge of a broken butte not far from Dave's first hiding-place, when a long black line hissed snake-like through the air and settled about Buck's shoulders with a savage jerk.

Arms pinned to his sides by the hard drawn noose, Buck was yanked from his saddle to lie half stunned on the rock-strewn ground.



Buck Was Yanked From His Saddle

CHAPTER EIGHT

Taking the Trail

Little by little his senses returned, and Buck was aware of dark forms bending over him. In his ears dinned the sound of jeering laughter.

Buck blinked his eyes and tried to rise; but the first movement told him that not only his hands but his



feet were tied. As he sank back on the ground a man's hand caught him by the collar and lifted him roughly to his feet.

“Haw-haw!” yammered one of his captors, “so yuh thought yuh'd outsmart us, did yuh, hairpin? Caught a nice little bump on the head for yore trouble, didn't yuh? Thought we was dumb fools, I reckon.”

“Shut yer yap, Jughead!” snap-



A Man Lifted Him Roughly to His Feet

ped another man, who stepped forward to face Buck in the moonlight. "The point is, Cowboy, yore wanted by the Sheriff for bein' accessory an' accomplice, an' six er seven more things, to that two-gun bandit yuh helped get away from us. We rekkernized yuh jest now by yore white hoss. As deppity sheriff I warn yuh that anythin' yuh say can be used to hang yuh; so speak up an' tell us where yuh got the



“Yore Wanted by the Sheriff.”

other feller hid out!"

After sizing up his captors with one keen look, Buck decided there was still a chance of fooling them. He shook his head sadly.

"Wouldn't do no good if I did tell you, hombre," he sighed.

"Huh! What d' yuh mean by that? The kid ain't dead already. is he? I knowed Grieger's slug hit him somewheres but—"

"But you didn't know how bad!"



Buck Sized up His Captors

Buck finished the sentence. "Can't you leave the boy to rest in peace? Oh, I know you'd like to get your hands on his hoss and guns and mebbe his clothes, just for evidence, but I ain't going to tell you and have your dirty paws messing up things that's better left undisturbed!"

"Don't get tough, hombre," retorted the deputy. "Yore in a pretty bad fix yoreself an' keepin' back in-



“Don’t Get Tough, Hombre.”

formation ain't goin' to do you no good."

"All the same, Jake," spoke up the third of Buck's captors, "if the kid is dead we ain't got no call to dig him up. No use hangin' a corpse; an' we've done wasted enough time on this manhunt. Anyhow, we got the kid's pardner, ain't we? I'm satisfied to let 'er go at that."

"Huh! Wal, mebbe yore right,



They Would Turn Him Over to the Sheriff

Tom. After all, if two men needed killin' it was them so-an'-sos, Bert Fallon an' Bronc Hardy. We'll jest take this here ranny down to Arroyo an' turn him over to Sheriff Billings. Then I reckon our duty's done."

Despite his bound and painful wrists, Buck laughed silently to himself as the three deputy sheriffs helped him to mount Silver and the four started on the back trail to



They Helped Him to Mount Silver

town. Without telling any direct lie, he had given the impression that Dave Fallon had died of his wound. Later, if the Sheriff should get that same impression, Young Dave would have every chance to recover in safety and time enough to get over the county line when his wound was healed. There was plenty of food and water back in the little box canyon.

To his own serious predicament,



The Four Started Back to Town

Buck gave little thought. He had been in so many dangerous scrapes before that he had little doubt of his ability to get out of this one.

Therefore, when the barred door of Arroyo jail clanged shut behind him an hour later, he merely grinned and stretched himself out on a narrow bunk for a peaceful nap.

When Young Dave opened his eyes on the following morning he



The Door Clanged Shut Behind Him

was not alarmed to discover Buck's absence. Probably, he thought, his friend was down at the mouth of the canyon on the lookout for pursuit. So he cooked his own breakfast, saving a portion for Buck.

Even when noon came and there was no sign of the big cowboy or his white stallion, Dave was not much worried. Buck was probably off on a scouting trip and would return any moment. When the sun



Dave Cooked His Own Breakfast

sank behind the canyon rim, however, Dave Fallon could no longer deny that something must have happened. If Buck had intended to be that long away from camp, he would surely have left a note or told Dave in advance.

The boy cooked and ate his lonely supper with little appetite. Then he sat for one long hour by the dying fire wondering what he should do.



Where Was Buck?

At last his smooth young jaw set grimly. He had come to a decision.

“Buck Jones saved me from hangin’ er jail at the risk of his own neck!” he gritted, “so it’s up t’ me, wound or no wound, to help him out of whatever scrape he’s got hisself into! I’m gonna trail him right now.”

Painfully, Dave managed to lift the heavy stock saddle onto his tall roan and draw tight the cinch.



Dave Saddled His Tall Roan

Then, sparing his wounded shoulder as much as he could, he mounted awkwardly and set off down the canyon trail. The moon was higher this evening, and in its brighter light Dave believed he could follow the faint trail of Buck's horse.

"No tellin' what sorta mess Buck is into," he told himself. "His hoss mebbe stumbled an' throwed him on the rocks, or mebbe he run spang into four or five Sheriff's men an'



He Set off Down the Canyon Trail

got shot or took prisoner. I better look out that the same thing don't happen to me!"

As he rode, he lifted his two heavy guns, one by one, from their slick holsters and spun the cylinders to make sure no sand had clogged their smooth action. Then he began circling to pick up such marks as Buck's horse might have left on the rough sandstone.

CHAPTER NINE

A Proposition

Dave was an excellent tracker, and since he knew what to look for, it was not long before he did pick up Buck's trail. It led him along, following close to the line of buttes, until it reached the spot where Buck had been yanked from his saddle by the deputy's snaky lariat.

There Dave noted the profusion of tracks and grunted in amazement as he read them.

“Three men ambushed Buck,” he decided, “an’ led him away, with hands roped, in the direction of town. Don’t look to me like he was hurt bad, though. Ain’t no blood on the stones.”

He paused and considered.

“All the same, jail is sure enough bad medicine. If they don’t stretch



He Noted the Profusion of Tracks

Buck's neck with a rope leastways they're sure to send him to the pen for five years or so. I ain't goin' to let nobody do that to Buck, even if I hafta take his place in the hoosegow. Now, I wonder what's the best way to give him a break?"

One after another Dave discarded half-formed plans. To attempt a jail delivery by force, holding up the jailer at the point of a gun, demanding Buck's release — that



He Pondered His Next Move

They'd give me a dose of lead in the stomach instead!"

Again he took time out for silent thought.

"Let's see now, if Buck jest had a coupla friends in town. By gum! I'd been fergettin' Doc Bronson! That feller was good enough to give all them supplies an' bandages to Buck fer me, so now mebbe he'd—"

Instead of finishing his sentence, Dave dug his heels into the roan's



Suddenly He Dashed Toward Arroyo

flanks and headed the horse at a long, mile-eating lope, straight for Arroyo.

Concealing his mount at the edge of town, Dave Fallon staggered wearily down Arroyo's single street, keeping as much in the shadow as possible until he reached Doc Bronson's white cottage. Arrived there, he leaned weakly against the door for a moment.

“I guess that bullet through my



He Leaned Weakly Against the Door

shoulder let most o' my strength leak out!" he whispered. "Anyhow, I got here, an' from now on it's up to Doc what happens."

Dave's cautious knock had to be repeated twice before the little doctor heard it and opened the door. Dave entered at Bronson's cheery invitation, and stood in the lighted doorway of the office, where the rays of a lamp fell full on his pale face and weary figure.



Dave Stood in the Lighted Doorway

Bronson, after one keen look, threw a supporting arm around the young cowboy's waist and half carried him to his office sofa.

"Let me take a squint at that shoulder of yours—quick, lad!" he snapped. "I know who you be an' you hadn't no business to ride with that gunshot wound. Ain't you got no sense at all?"

His skillful fingers stripped away Dave's torn shirt and peeled



Bronson Carried Him to the Sofa

off the outer bandages.

“Umm! jest as I thought—yuh started the hole bleedin’ again, an’ by the look of yuh yuh can’t afford to lose no more blood, young feller. I’ll fix that pronto! But yuh ain’t goin’ to budge from that sofy all night!”

The Two-Gun Kid laughed softly.

“I reckon it’ll take more’n six men to hold me down on it!” he



"Don't Budge From That Sofy!"

answered. "I got a job o' work to do, Doc, an' aim to do it tonight or die tryin'. Thought mebbe you might help out a mite too, if yuh felt like it."

"Yuh did, huh?" growled the little medical man, as he placed fresh dressings on the wound. "I reckon yuh want me to get my neck stretched along with you and that pardner of yours. I know what yore thinkin' — yuh want me to



He Placed Fresh Dressings on the Wound

help yuh make a jail delivery an' get yore pardner away. Well—”

He tightened the bandage until Dave winced in spite of himself.

“Guess I might's well be killed for a sheep as a lamb,” he went on. “I’m already guilty of obstructin’ the law by helpin’ out a couple men wanted for murder. Might’s well go the whole hog: What’s yore plan, Mister Two-Gun Kid?”



"What's Yore Plan, Two-Gun Kid?"

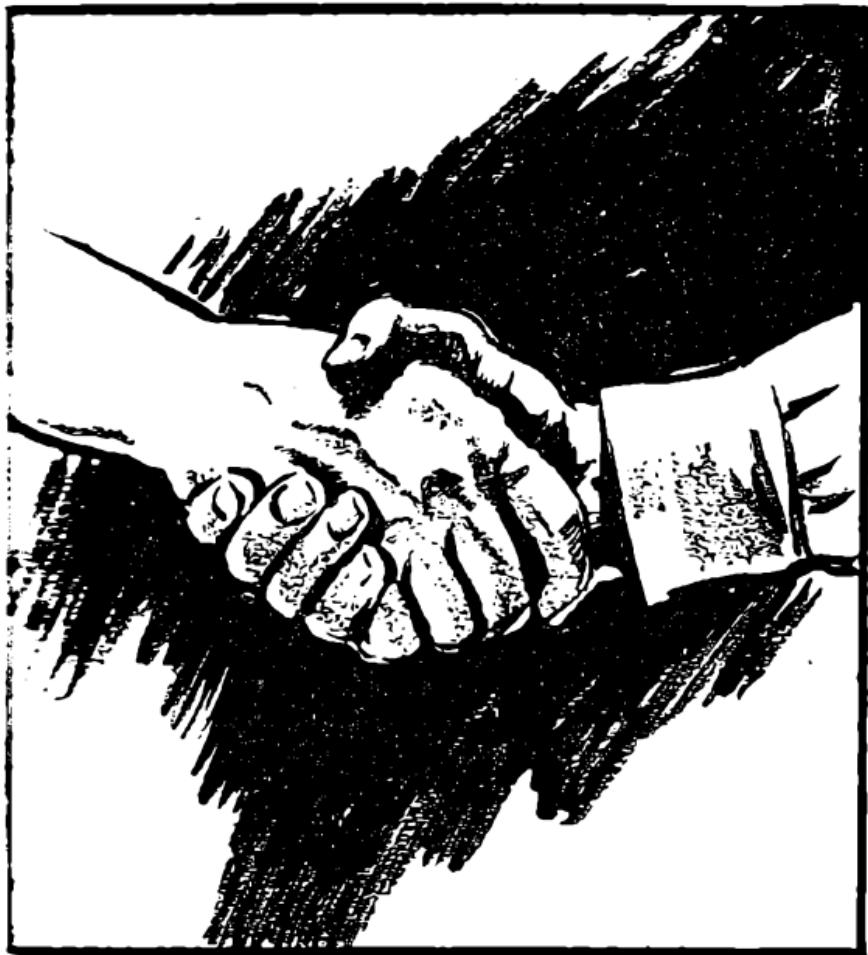
CHAPTER TEN

An Accomplice

Dave Fallon reached for the little doctor's hand and gripped it.

"Doc," he said huskily, "you sure are a white man! But I don't aim to get yuh into no trouble fer helpin' us, if there's another way out."

The doctor grinned and nodded.



Dave Gripped the Doctor's Hand

“Anyhow, Doc, you gotta know my whole story afore I let yuh run more risk. Fer all you know yet, I might be the wust kind of a killer, an’ deserve to have my neck stretched from here to yonder. You gotta know jest why I killed them two human sidewinders . . .”

The young man launched into a full recital. As Dave finished his story, Doc Bronson bobbed his head understandingly.



“You Gotta Know My Whole Story.”

"I jedged it was somethin' like that, boy," he remarked. "But I'm right obliged to you for tellin' me the details. It's satisfyin' to know I was jestified in doin' what I could fer you an' yore pardner. Now, you spoke about me helpin' you, somehow? I reckon you got a plan?"

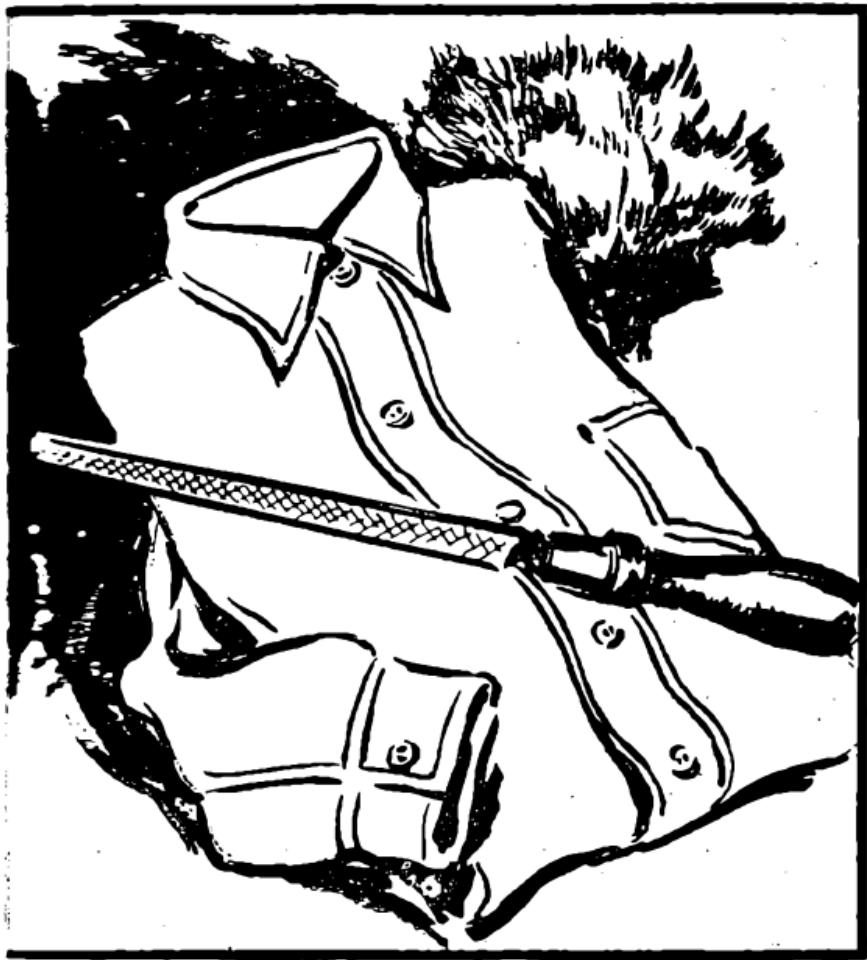
"Yep! I sure have, Doc," answered the Two-Gun Kid. "But it mostly depends on yore scarin' up a file, an' a white shirt, an' a few



“I Reckon You Got a Plan?”

other things, includin' a piece of dark fur or mebbe some black hoss hair. All you need do is jest tie 'em up in a bundle, an' I'll take it back over to the jail. Reckon I can get up close to the back winder in the dark an' shove the stuff through the bars—”

“You'll do nothin' of the kind, sonny!” snorted the doctor. “Yore stayin' right where you be on that there sof'y from now till when we



Part of the Plan

have to ride. I'll take that bundle over myself!"

The Two-Gun Kid gasped a protest.

"Gosh-all, Doc, that sure is white of yuh, but yuh ain't got no call to risk yoreself that away. He's MY pardner, yuh recall."

"And bein' yore pardner he'd want yuh to rest that wound as long as yuh can," retorted Bronson. "Now don't get off that sofy till



“Wait Till I Get Back.”

I get back! When yore friend has filed through a couple bars an' is ready to make his break, I'll let yuh got out an' meet him—that's a promise. But how about a hoss?"

"I been thinkin' of that," Dave replied, "an' I don't reckon Buck'd ever be satisfied if he left his Silver hoss behind. That's why I want a white shirt fer him to put on, Doc. Yuh see, he's wearin' a blue one now an' we don't want



"I Been Thinkin' of That."

him rekkernized when he gets out on the street an' heads fer the stable where Silver is."

"That's right," nodded the doctor. "But I'll get my hoss out, jest in case yore pardner don't locate his own in time. An' about that piece of black fur—reckon I know what yuh want it for."

Chuckling merrily, the chubby little man bustled out of the room.

An hour later the back door of



The Little Man Bustled out of the Room

Doc Bronson's cottage opened gently and the doctor himself entered on tiptoe. Finding the Two-Gun Kid awake, he sat down beside him on the sofa and wiped his pink bald head with a blue bandana handkerchief.

"I got the stuff to yore pardner, all right," he said, "an' I talked to him for a spell through the bars. Dawggone, that lad don't seem to think bein' in jail is anythin' seri-



The Doctor Entered on Tiptoe

ous at all. He was jest as cheerful when I first spoke to him as he was after I'd give him the file an' all. He sure has got steady nerves! I was shakin' in my boots all the time fer fear somebody'd see me an' shoot without askin' no questions."

"You shoulda let me go, Doc," Dave protested. "You ain't got no business runnin' risks fer my pardner!"



"I Was Shakin' in My Boots."

“Aw, shut up!” snorted the little medico. “I’m right glad I done it! Yore friend says he can saw through a couple of them iron bars by two o’clock tonight. I reckon you’ll insist on bein’ there then an’ helpin’ him make his getaway. But now you’ve got to obey MY orders, boy, an’ go to sleep. I’ll wake yuh in plenty of time.”

“Okay, Doc, an’ thanks a heap!”

With a contented sigh, young



“Now Go to Sleep.”

Dave Fallon rolled over on the sofa and closed his eyes.

At exactly two in the morning Dave's anxious whisper sounded at the jail window.

“Are you okay, Buck?”

A sound of twisting metal answered him.

“Stand clear, pardner. I'll be with you in two shakes of a steer's tail. These here bars cut through like they were made of wood!”



“Are You Okay, Buck?”

Buck was as good as his word. In almost less time than it takes to tell, he was standing outside in the shadow of the jail beside Dave Fallon.

“I reckon you fixed up a dummy in yore bed to look like as if you was still layin’ there?” the latter whispered.

“Yeah! And it’s bound to fool anybody who looks in at that piece of dark fur, Doc gave me. Looks



“Stand Clear, Pardner.”

just like my own hair against the pillow. And with this white shirt I got on nobody's going to suspect who I am. The only things I want now are a cartridge belt and a pair of guns."

"I got 'em right here, Buck," answered Dave. "Doc Bronson put 'em in my hand jest as I was leavin' the house. Says he's got some extra ones of his own so you needn't bother to return 'em."



Dave Handed Him a Cartridge Belt

“Well, I’ll be hornswoggled! If that little doc ain’t the whitest man I ever met! If it wasn’t for him, you and I wouldn’t be here now, that’s gospel. Now, we’ve got all the breaks. Just let me get Silver at the livery stable, and half our troubles are over! I’ll pretend to be a deputy—”

Ten minutes later the two partners were riding cautiously out of Arroyo, keeping to the rear of



They Rode out of Arroyo

the darkened buildings. Suddenly Dave, instead of swinging toward their old hide-out, turned his tall roan's head north.

“Hold on a minute!” cried Buck. “Ain’t you got mixed up in your directions, Pardner?”

“Not so’s yuh notice it,” Dave laughed in reply. “I aim to finish a job you started out on, Buck, when them deppities nabbed you. Grieger’s still loose an’ I’m not goin’ to



"Hold on a Minute!" Cried Buck

rest till we get him to spill the whole works. That was yore idea when yuh left him last night, wasn't it?"

Buck grunted.

"Uh-uh! But with your wound, Dave—oh, all right, if you think you can make it, Kid, there ain't no better time than now. We ought to get there before sunrise, about the time everybody's up for breakfast."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Battle at the Ranch

Four o'clock that morning found Buck Jones and Dave Fallon approaching the corral of the Flying-F ranch. They dared not ride nearer than couple of hundred yards, for even in the darkness the big stallion's glistening white coat would show up very distinctly.

Behind a little dip of ground, they tethered their animals to a low-growing juniper, and crept on until they had reached the rear wall of the ranch house. There were already lights in two or three windows.

From somewhere within came a mutter of voices, broken now and then by the harsh nasal tone of someone who seemed to be giving orders.



They Crept Close to the Ranch House

It occupied Buck and Dave scarcely a moment to locate the room in which the conversation was taking place. It was on the ground floor toward the back of the building, and its single window was low enough for a man to look in.

Dave's spirits rose with a jump as he recognized the chief speaker. He was the same pot-bellied coward who had shot him from the door



Dave Recognized the Speaker

of the Astoria restaurant in Arroyo. It was Greasy Joe without a doubt.

The voices came now distinctly.

“I don’t give a hang what yuh may THINK yuh know!” Grieger cried, slapping a pudgy fist onto the desk behind which he sat. “Whatever Bert Fallon told you was a bunch of lies, anyway, an’ not one o’ you birds has any proof to make ‘em stick. I tell you, I’m



They Heard Angry Voices

sellin' this ranch next week, an' you can keep yore jobs—if the new owner happens to like yore looks, which I doubt," he added with a sneer. "Now get out an' round up the rest of the young stock like I told you. An' you get no extra wages for it either. That's all! Now clear out, 'cause you've all had yore beauty sleep. I'm goin' back to Arroyo, but I'll be on the job by noon to see that you didn't loaf.



“Now Get Out!”

Gwan—get out now!"

Buck laughed to himself as he thought how nobly Lady Luck seemed to be helping them again. If Greasy Joe Grieger were going back to town alone, the business of kidnapping him ought to be as easy as rolling off a log.

Still grinning, Buck watched the restaurant keeper fold up a bunch of papers and turn out the kerosene lamp above his head. In a



They Watched the Restaurant Keeper

couple of minutes the fat man would be getting into his wagon, which must be tied by the corral, and—

THUD!

A universe of stars seemed to explode in Buck's brain. But the blow which had caught him had been a glancing one, and some degree of consciousness remained. Blindly Buck turned, and found himself grappling with a shouting



THUDI

kicking, gouging antagonist, whom he tried instinctively to keep from using again the club or gun with which he had struck the first cowardly blow. At the same time he was aware that Dave was struggling on the ground with a second attacker.

Each second that passed was that much gained, for Buck's senses were clearing enough to realize that the pounding of feet which he



Dave Was Struggling on the Ground

now heard meant that other men were coming up. Quick action was needed to prevent capture or worse.

Inside the room, Grieger could be heard shouting and stumbling over the furniture.

Catching his struggling opponent by leg and shoulder, Buck heaved the man's body at the window, shattering the glass, and stunning him. Then he stooped and flung off the man who was throt-



Buck Heaved the Man's Body

dling Dave, just as half-a-dozen ranch hands rushed around the corner.

“Quick, Pardner!” he barked, helping the exhausted boy to his feet. “Grab my hands when I get inside!”

With that, Buck hurled himself through the broken window, and leaning out, seized the Kid’s wrists. One mighty heave, and both were inside the darkened room—and no:



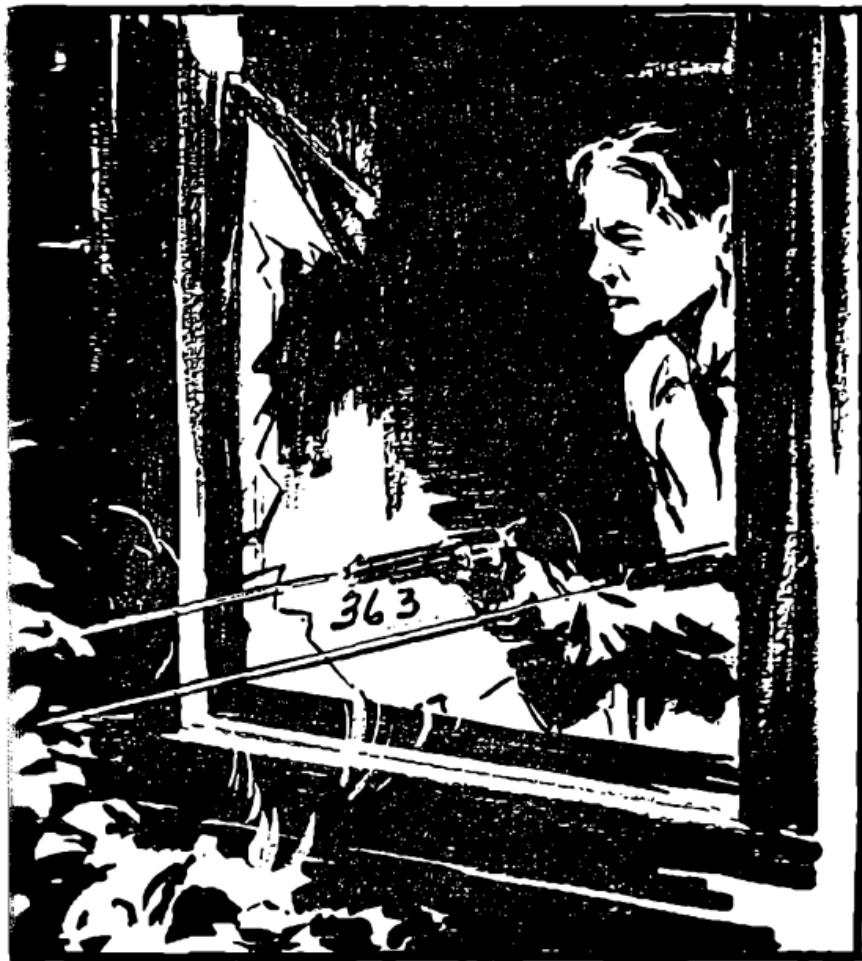
He Seized the Kid's Wrists

a second too soon, either!

Grieger's ranch hands had arrived in force.

Whirling, Buck threw two shots over the window sill, one of which lifted a man's hat from his head. Two or three other revolver shots answered Buck's, but they ranged high, and the noise of jostling feet showed that the attackers had fallen back.

Buck used the few moments thus



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Jack Threw Two Shots Over the Window Sill

gained to grope in the darkness for the room's other occupant. When he had found him, Grieger was already helpless with fright. It took Buck but a few seconds to tie him securely with his own belt. After that, Buck helped Dave into one corner, out of range from either the door or the window, while he reloaded his guns.

As he had expected, there came a trampling in the hall outside the



He Quickly Reloaded His Guns

door. Bullets crashed through the thin panels, followed by a bellowing voice.

“Toss yore guns out of the window, hombres, or we’ll fill every corner of that room with lead!”

“Don’t you dare! Don’t you try it, boys!” Greasy Joe’s scream rose shrilly through the barrier. “You will get me too, if yuh do!”

A hoarse laugh answered from the other side of the door.



Bullets Crashed Through the Thin Panels

"I don't reckon that'd be much loss neither! You'll hafta take yore chances, Greasy, 'cause we're shootin' to save yore property. If you don't live to profit by it, we won't mind takin' it over ourselves."

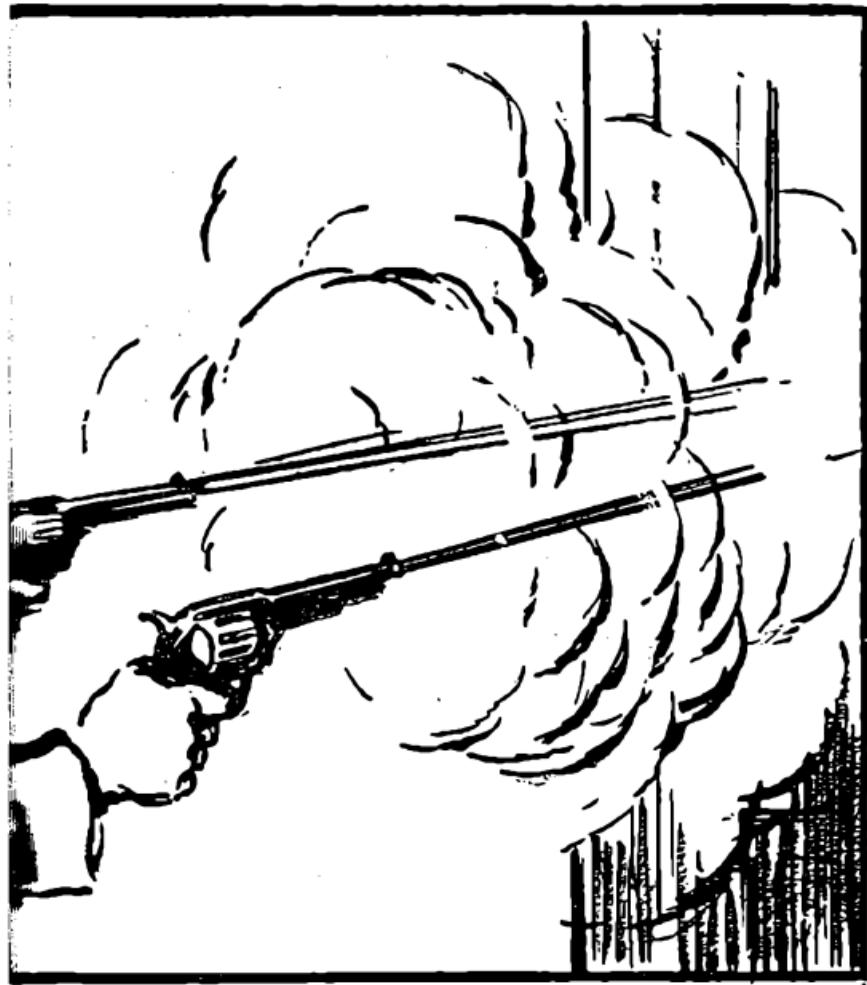
Again came a volley of shrieks and protests from the helpless Grieger. When the complaints stopped from lack of breath, Buck's low laughter filled the room.

"Don't worry, Grieger!" he said



Grieger Shrieked in Protest

"I reckon this ranch house is built solid enough so's their lead won't be able to reach us except through the door and window, and we're out of line with those. Maybe they've forgotten that bullets can pass two ways through those panels. No, I guess we're safe enough for a while. Trouble is, the Kid and I are caught like a couple of rats in a trap. We got in easy, but it ain't so easy to get out."



Again the Guns Spoke

“S’posin’ they batter down the door?” quavered the fat man. “They could rush you before you could shoot ‘em all down.”

Buck grinned scornfully.

“Yeah! They could do that. But then four or five of ‘em would get a bellyful of lead while they were doing it, and I don’t reckon they think that we’re worth that much. One thing they might do,” he added in a whisper, “is to set fire to



"S'posin' They Batter Down the Door?"

the whole shebang and burn us up. I hope they don't get that idea. Don't you dare let a yip out of you while I sneak up to the door and listen to what they are saying. There's some sort of a confab going on."



“I'll Sneak Up to the Door.”

CHAPTER TWELVE

To the Rescue

For two tense minutes, Buck lay flat on the floor with his ear to the crack under the door. Then he rose to his feet slowly and returned on tiptoe to his corner.

“Just as I feared, Dave,” he muttered. “They’ve got the idea, all right, and have just finished their



Buck Lay on the Floor and Listened

plans to set fire to the house!"

Grieger was stricken speechless with terror. He merely groaned.

"Yeah, Fatty," Buck commented, "they figure you're a gone goose, anyway, and they'd just as soon you'd be a cooked one. You were going to fire them all in a few days, anyhow, and you know some things about them which might get them in bad with the law. So they are going to play safe and burn u-



Grieger Was Speechless With Terror

the living evidence, so to speak. From their standpoint it is just so much good luck they've got Dave and me too. What they plan to do is wait till the fire forces us out of the window. Then they'll pick us off while we're outlined against the light of the flames. Trouble is, I can't see how they're going to fail. We couldn't rip up a couple of floor boards and drop down into the cellar, could we?"



They Were to Be Victims of a Plot

“The cellar ain’t under this part of the house,” Grieger wailed. “But listen, Stranger, whoever yuh be, ain’t there NO way out fer us?”

Dave laughed again harshly.

“There ain’t no way out right now, Grieger,” he replied. “We jest gotta bank on our luck, I guess, until—huh! Jest take a sniff o’ that! They’ve set a fire out in the hall. Smell the kerosene smoke?”

As the fire took hold, Greasy’s



“They’ve Set Fire out in the Hall.”

frightened howls rose above the crackle of flames and the devilish taunts of the men outside.

Suddenly there was an interruption. The staccato reports of pistol fire broke out somewhere to the front of the house, and, in the abrupt silence that followed, a familiar voice snapped orders.

“Drop yore gun belts, the rest o’ you murdering devils, unless yuh want to gulp down hot lead! All



“Drop Yore Gun Belts!”

right, now — get into that there house with yore hands reaching high an' put that fire out while I keep an eye on yuh. Never mind goin' fer no water. Rip up them two beds over in the corner th̄ere an' smother the flames with them mattresses an' blankets. Remember —one funny move out o' yuh brings bullets!"

With exultant whoops, Buck and Dave charged to the door. Flinging



The Men Began to Smother the Flames

it open, they were met by a wall of smoke and flames. For an instant, they hesitated. Then, covering their faces, they burst through.

By the light of the fire, Doc Bronson's stocky figure showed holding two Colt revolvers on the unwilling fire-fighters. His only greeting was a short nod of the head. Eyes and guns he kept trained steadily on his captives.

“All right, boys, we can clear



For an Instant, They Hesitated

out now that yore loose!" their rescuer barked. "I got these fellers' guns, so they ain't likely to jump the three of us. Whadda yuh say?"

Buck Jones gulped the fresh air into his lungs and wiped his streaming eyes.

"Doc," he answered, "there's something in that back room I want to save first. It's worth a plenty even though its looks are against it. You and Dave just keep



Buck Wiped His Streaming Eyes

your guns on these mal hombres while I go back in there. Lucky for us they didn't start the fire in more than one place!"

Ten minutes of furious work saw the last of the fire put out. The damage was not great. Part of the main living room and the short hall leading to the office were badly charred and smoke-blackened.

Dave's shoulder was bleeding



They Worked Furiously

again, but the chief damage seemed to have been suffered by Greasy Joe Grieger's nerves. When Buck hauled him out of the smoke-filled office his wits seemed to have been shattered by fear. After his traitorous ranch hands had been securely tied—that is, what was left of them, for Bronson had wounded three desperadoes in his first attack—it took a half hour to bring Grieger back to reason.



Bronson Had Wounded Three Desperadoes

While Doc Bronson with his two revolvers cocked kept a lookout at the door for any more hostile ranch hands who might be lurking about, Buck Jones took charge of the questioning.

Grieger's howls of terror had quieted. Though he was still moaning with abject fright, some gleam of intelligence began to show in his fishy eyes.



Buck Jones Took Charge

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A Confession

“Now, Grieger!” Buck’s voice was harsh with menace. “There’s just one thing that can save your dirty neck — and that’s the truth. First question: Who put Dillon and Hardy up to murdering the real Bert Fallon?”

Greasy Joe shrank back in the



Gasping Breaths Issued From His Mouth

chair to which he was tied. His face turned green. Gasping breaths issued from his slack mouth. He said no word.

But Dave Fallon took one swift stride toward the cringing man. Dave had his gun out, and deadly rage burned in his eyes.

“Talk, you crawlin’ snake! Talk, er I’ll fill yore carcass full o’ lead.”

“Don’t shoot!” Grieger gurgled. “I didn’t kill yore brother—”



“Talk, You Crawlin’ Snake!”

“I know that!” snapped young Dave. “But yuh got word to Dillon an’ Hardy that Uncle Asa had left this ranch to Bert. An’ you also told ’em that nobody in Wyomin’ ever seed my brother — didn’t yuh?”

Grieger squirmed, hesitated, and at last nodded his head.

“An’ yore reason fer puttin’ them two devils up to murderin’ my brother was ’cause you knowed



Grieger Squirmed—Then Nodded His Head

that Bert had saved up enough money to pay most o' the mortgage yuh held on this here ranch. Ain't that so?"

Again Grieger squirmed miserably, but Dave's gun barrel rapped him sharply under the chin. The frightened man nodded his head in frantic confession.

"In other words," Buck cut in, "you, Grieger, not only helped but you PLANNED the murder of



Dave's Gun Barrel Rapped Him Sharply

Bert Fallon. Later your plans began to go wrong. When Dillon had took over this ranch in Bert Fallon's name, he wanted to keep it for himself and wouldn't let you foreclose like you planned. He probably threatened to expose you as an accomplice and blackmailed you for more money. Am I right?"

"He had me plumb scared!" gulped Grieger. "I hadda do jest what he said. Dillon was bad an'



“Am I Right?”

plumb desperate. He was ready to kill me or get us both hanged. He would've, too, if I'd—”

“Yeah! You were scared to call his bluff! So you faked them letters and got young Dave up here to shoot it out with his brother's murderers, right in front of your restaurant. You hoped they'd all three be killed; but if any of 'em came through the gunfight, you planned to shoot him in the back.



Buck Took Stronger Measures

You figured that dead men never speak up.”

Doc Bronson’s angry yelp broke in.

“You put that down in black an’ white, Grieger, or I’ll drill yuh myself. I got more’n half a mind to do it now—”

The little doctor flourished two guns wildly under Greasy Joe’s horrified eyes.

“D-d-d-d-don’t let ‘im shoot!”



The Doctor Flourished Two Guns Wildly

wailed the quivering fat man. "I'll agree to anythin'! I'll sign a paper—I'll tell—I'll—"

"And cancel all the mortgages that you hold against this ranch," added Buck grimly. "You owe the kid a thousand times more than that!"

"If yuh DON'T call 'em off," snarled Doc Bronson fiercely, "I'll gun-whip you till the coroner hisself won't rekkernize you. A poison rep-



“D-d-d-don’t Let ‘Im Shoot!”

tile like you has been let live too long! That's what's hard on honest men's stomachs. Arroyo'll be a clean town when yore put where yuh belong!"

When the demoralized Grieger had finally scrawled his name at the end of a full confession, Buck picked it up. Then he turned to the four hard-case punchers who lay bound on the floor.

"Reckon your hands ain't none



Grieger Signed the Confession

too clean," he observed, "but as witnesses to this document, you'll be legal, anyhow. How about it? Dave, here, might make some bargain with you, right now, in exchange for your handsome autographs."

"Buck's right!" agreed the Two-Gun Kid. "You rannies sign yore names on thet there paper an' yuh can clear out of here."

"Suits me, right down to the



"You Rannies Sign Yore Names!"

ground!" answered one of the four men. "I ain't no angel, but if I ever got as low-down an' pizenous as Greasy Joe, I'd shoot myself quick."

The other punchers growled their agreement and put their scrawling signatures on the document. Ten minutes later they were riding out of the ranch yard, headed for distant parts.

Watching them go, the Two-Gun



They Headed for Distant Parts

Kid heaved a weary sigh of relief.

“Doc,” he said, “how come yuh showed up, like Providence, jest when we were needin’ help most? Thought we’d left you behind in Arroyo. Then, all to once, yuh come bangin’ away with yore two shootin'-irons like an old-time gun thrower!”

The physician grinned and winked a roguish eye.

“You don’t know nothin’ ‘bout



The Physician Winked a Roguish Eye

me afore I took up doctorin'," he said. "Anyhow, you gotta get up early an' ride fast to leave old Doc Bronson eatin' yore dust. I jest guessed where you-all was headed, an' trailed along after. You ain't sorry, I make bold to conclude."

"Gosh, no!" yelped Dave Fallon. "I sure owe my life, an' all I got, to you, Doc — an' to my friend, Buck Jones!"

"Aw, shucks, Dave!" protested



Dave Fallon Made a Proposition

Buck, "you don't owe us—"

"No more'n what I said!" Dave cut in. "an' that's everythin' I possess. So if you two don't want to go equal pardners with me in this here Flyin'-F ranch, I ain't gonna take no part of it myself. That's flat!"

Buck exchanged glances with Doc Bronson.

There was a moment's silence. Then the hands of the three men

met and gripped, sealing a partnership that was to last for life.

“That,” vowed the Two-Gun Kid heartily, “is what I calls a good day’s job o’ work.”

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